



Northeast Minnesota Master Gardener

MAY 2012

COMMUNICATING & EDUCATING WITHIN OUR REGION
SERVING CARLTON, COOK, LAKE AND ST. LOUIS COUNTIES

State Master Gardener Program Updates



2012 Upper Midwest Regional Master Gardener Conference

by Hennepin County Master Gardeners

July 19 –21 at the UMN Landscape Arboretum in Chanhassen, will be the site of the conference this year. Every two years, this conference is hosted by WI, IL, IA or MN. This year it is our turn.

The conference will feature a vendor fair, a silent auction, book signings Minnesota Wine Opening Reception, and a Minnesota Buffet Banquet featuring speaker Dr. Ed Schneider, UMN Landscape Arboretum director.

You must pre-register as there is no on-site registration. You must be a Master Gardener to register. The Arboretum entrance fee is included with registration.

To register you need to go to:

<http://hennepinmastergardeners.org/events/upper-midwest-master-gardener-conference/>

The cost to attend is \$165 for all three days but you may register for just one day or a partial Saturday. Register by June 1 to receive a conference T-shirt.

Dr. Vince Fritz, U of M, will be the keynote speaker addressing 'Take 2 Brussel Sprouts & Call Me in the Morning' at the conference start on Thursday morning at 9:00 a.m. He is followed by some great topic choices that include *some* of the following:

(There are too many choices to mention all of the sessions.)

- Organic Growing: Building a Healthy Soil
 - How Climate Change May Affect MN Ecosystems
 - Invasive Earthworms in Minnesota Forests
 - Truth about Garden Remedies
 - Close-up Photography in the Garden
 - Managing Diseases in the Vegetable Home Garden
 - Don't Let the Rain Run Down the Drain
 - Watch Out for These Insects
 - Grape Breeding at the University of Minnesota
 - Earth-Kind Landscaping
 - Monitoring Monarchs
 - Shady Natives for the Perennial Landscape
 - History of Annuals
 - Turning Your Garden into a Bee Sanctuary
 - Sketching in the Garden
 - Trees & Shrub Cultivar Development
 - Planting Green Assets, Not Brown Liabilities
 - Urban Gardens: Growing Produce or Growing Kids?
 - Being Successful with Low Maintenance Roses
 - Bee Pollinator Field Class
 - Carrying Your Garden Inside: Floral Design Tips
 - IPM for Master Gardeners
 - Preventing Lyme Disease
 - Walking Garden Tours
 - New Ways of Landscaping with Grasses
 - Biochar: The Truth Behind the Research
- plus a lot more classes... This is a wonderful opportunity to accumulate continuing education hours while learning more about what is happening around the state.

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Carlton County Master Gardeners

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Back Care for the Gardener

by Sarah VanderMaiden

"Some Master Gardener I am," I thought to myself as I surveyed the weed patch that was supposed to be my bountiful vegetable garden last summer. A bad fall years ago combined with poor posture over time had given me some lower back issues but it was my pregnancy that finally did my L5-S1 disc in, requiring surgery in August of 2011. My recovery has been going great but I know I need to start doing things differently if I want to avoid any further damage to my back.

How's your back been treating you – and, more importantly, how have you been treating your back? If your spring-time garden prep includes investing in a large bottle of Advil, it might be time for you to think about doing things differently as well.

In researching this topic, I became acquainted with Renee Cottrell, a Physical Therapist with over 30 years of experience who also happens to be a Master Gardener living outside Detroit, Michigan. Renee has frequently educated gardeners about this topic and was more than happy to share her thoughts for this article. Of course, your best resource for any concerns regarding your back, including ways to strengthen and maintain your back, is your doctor, chiropractor or physical therapist.

According to Renee, 9 out of 10 people will suffer from some sort of back ailment in their lifetime and gardeners are no exception. Although most people can point to a particular event that led to their back pain, back problems rarely arise from a single episode. The identified event usually was just the final blow to a back that was damaged through poor care over time.

As a fellow Master Gardener, Renee reminds us that gardening is a very physical activity and that gardeners would benefit from conditioning and maintaining their bodies much like an athlete does. How many people do you know could arise from a long winter on the couch and run a full marathon with no pain the next day? We gardeners think nothing of getting out in the yard the first nice day of spring and doing physically exerting work for many more hours than it takes to run a marathon. And we wonder why our backs hurt!

Now that we are in the mindset of the gardener-athlete, think about how athletes prepare for their sport. Some athletes perform conditioning exercises and stretches that are specific to their sport. Others prefer to "cross-train", engaging in a variety of activities that will strengthen all muscle groups and improve their cardio-vascular fitness.

Whatever approach you take, be sure to start your conditioning well before the "main event."

Renee recommends gardeners participate in a back-care maintenance program, learning specific stretches and strengthening exercises to make your back stronger. "Lift with your legs, not with your back" is

not just a cliché; it is a proven technique that will help preserve your back. Learn the proper mechanics of bending, lifting, pushing, and pulling properly. Here are a few techniques shared by Renee:



Taking care of our bodies as we get older allows us to continue gardening.

- Maintain proper posture and head and joint alignment.
- Avoid bending from the waist to pick up items from the ground. Bend your knees and use a squatting motion, keeping your back as upright as possible.
- Position the object to be lifted as close as possible to the center of gravity located just below our navel. Objects held further away place greater strain across the lower spine.
- Test before lifting.
- Use mechanical /other assistive devices when possible.
- Tighten your stomach muscles without holding your breath. This helps create a "natural corset," stabilizing the muscles of your core.
- Lift with a smooth, not jerking, motion.
- Let your leg muscles do the work.
- Pivot your feet instead of twisting the trunk.
- Push instead of pull whenever possible. It is easier to recruit leg muscles to do the work and you will be less likely to use inappropriate trunk motions.

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Cook County Master Gardeners

High Tunnels in Minnesota

What Do We Know?

By Diane Booth

High tunnel growing in colder climates has become the latest 'buzz' to help small growers compete in the locally grown food market.

So what exactly is a high tunnel? They look like greenhouses but are used quite differently. They are plastic enclosures that use no artificial heat except for emergencies. No artificial ventilation like fans, tubes or forced air is used either. Plants are not grown in pots but are grown in soil. High tunnels allow crops to be grown up to three zones earlier and later while eliminating some risk.

Site selection is critical. It needs to be located where good soils are available. It should be built in the fall when the soil is most compacted. Stay out of the tunnel until the spring. Make sure the soil inside the tunnel is about 6" higher than soils outside the tunnel. Otherwise your soils inside will be lower and water will run into and pool inside your high tunnel. Water access is necessary. Electricity may be beneficial. The narrow end of the greenhouse should be in line with the prevailing winds. The tunnel should be located in full sun.

Information from the February 2012 MN Statewide High Tunnel Conference stated, "The smallest effective high tunnel would be 12' wide, 9' tall and 20' long. The hoops ideally should be constructed of 1.66" galvanized steel to withstand up to 100 mph winds and our snow loads. PVC pipe is not recommended. However, if you are determined to use PVC pipe make sure it is rated for electrical work because it is stronger and is ultraviolet light rated. You can also add four 6" x 6" timbers on each end to help strengthen your tunnel.

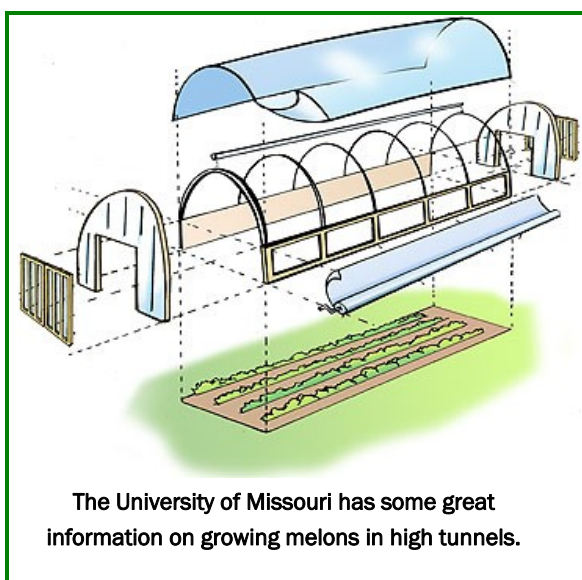
Plastic coverings should be a minimum 6 mil plastic, greenhouse grade that has an additive to slow deterioration from ultraviolet light and may have infrared inhibitors that help reduce heat loss. Greenhouse grade plastics will last 4–10 years. Some have anti-drip surfaces that minimize water condensing

on the plastic film interior.

Natural ventilation is key for high tunnels. The sides should roll up at least 4' on each side. This allows air to go in through the sides and ventilate through the gable ends. You want continued air flow to keep diseases down and to control the amount of heat inside the tunnel.

There are three growing areas in the high tunnel. Area Three is the warmest area and is located in the middle of the high tunnel. Cucumbers and melons work well here on a raised trellis system. They prefer temperatures of 85-90 degrees and would be installed inside the tunnel towards the end of May. If you use a trellis system, make sure that your system is not tied to the high tunnel framework. The plants can become too heavy and actually cause structural

damage. Additionally, the wind can blow the framework around and snap stems off your plants if they are tied to the framework of the tunnel. Area Two is the area parallel on both sides of Area Three. This is a great space for growing peppers or tomatoes. They prefer temperatures of around 80-90 degrees when transplanted from April 25–May 10. Area One, a three–four feet area along the tunnel edge, can be used for cool season crops like onions, radishes, spinach, lettuce or gladiolus. Cabbage or broccoli in this area would be set out April 7–15.



The University of Missouri has some great information on growing melons in high tunnels.

At the conference, a presentation from Scenic Valley Farms highlighted a version of high tunnels that have greatly increased production. They are not full-fledged greenhouses in the traditional sense but are hybrids between tunnels and greenhouses. They utilize solar thermal heating and cooling systems in addition to the natural ventilation system. Currently they are investigating use of wind energy for electricity to support more of a fully automated high tunnel system. These new high tunnel systems have increased their fruit and vegetable yields up to 400% compared to field grown produce. These higher yields offset the more labor intensive practices and create a year-round growing environment. Suitable crops for high tunnels include: cucumbers, berries, beans, onions, flowers, peppers, blackberries, strawberries, watermelons, tomatoes, herbs, cherries and much more.

So, as you re-evaluate your growing needs over the next year, you may want to include a high tunnel in your plans.

What's New?

by Kit Sitter

Society's craving for style and the "newest thing" constantly bombards us. The hottest fashions, the latest decorating color, the newest food trend- all invite us to be the trendsetter. But what about your garden? How do you know what to plant to outshine your neighbor? I spoke with Debbie Lonnee at Bailey Nurseries to find out what is influencing new trends in the plant world.

Debbie is the Planning and Administration manager at Bailey's. She has been in that position since 2006 and is beginning her 20th spring with Bailey Nurseries, Inc. Her department is responsible for new testing, royalties, production issues, plant acquisitions, and working closely with plant breeders and producers. New shrub introductions are the focus at Bailey's, although they do some trees and perennials.

Debbie cites two major factors that drive their work: color and size. Color features might be in foliage that lasts most of the season, an interesting variegated leaf, or an unusual colored berry. The color might be prominent at an unusual time of the year or for an extended period within the season. The second trend is production of reduced or dwarf sizing in plant material. As the economy and the population age, people are downsizing their living environments. Smaller yards, gardens for small spaces, and condo size patios take priority and have dictated the size of shrub that customers want for those spaces. A standard 10-15' high or wide shrub is no longer applicable for many homes or businesses.

A couple recent introductions which meet both these trends have been ninebark 'little devil' and a dwarf hydrangea, 'tickled pink'. The ninebark has the burgundy leaf color of 'diablo' and is only 4' high. The hydrangea is also only 4' tall and the blooms are a white to pink tone.

Debbie and her colleagues take several site visit trips to growers' farms located mostly across the U.S. and Europe. They are looking for individual plants that demonstrate unusual traits in color and size. In the U.S., if they find an intriguing sample, the shrub can be simply boxed up and shipped back to Minnesota for development. Europe presents a little more challenge and Bailey's must deal with import brokers and the Dept. of Agriculture to bring back cuttings or bare root stock. Quarantine periods can last up to 2 years before testing a shrub begins.

Getting a new cultivar to the wholesale market could take 2-10 years depending upon the quarantine period and how long Bailey's decides to test it. Hardiness is critical to the testing, in addition to how well the plant will react to both



'Tickled Pink' hydrangea

the nursery and the private garden conditions. Plants are tested mostly in Cottage Grove, MN, on multiple farms in Oregon, at some sites in Canada, and also some private individual sites (especially to test Zone 3). Previously, public places like Arboretums were used, but more secure locations away from the public were needed in order to control the test results. If you happen to be thinking you'd like to be one of their individual testers, Bailey's is not currently accepting new private testers at this time. Their preference is to use retired horticulture professors, due to the amount of control and training required for solid results.

Zone hardiness is very important to Bailey's and if anything, they err toward a conservative zoning label. They make sure their plants are northern grown and watch the evidence that dictates the true zone of a plant. Because of the concern for correct hardiness, they are extremely careful about testing products from Europe and also from southern U.S. locations like Georgia, where they often visit renowned horticulturist Dr. Michael Dirr's experimental acreage. One such plant they picked up there for testing was 'bella anna' hydrangea, which excited Debbie and her co-workers because it totally broke the color barrier. The shrub is a pink re-bloomer form of 'annabelle' and can survive zone 3. As we know, the color black is tough to find, so another "jaw-dropping" discovery was a black Petunia, 'black velvet', found in some CA trials of annuals.

Discovering these exciting varieties is balanced with the reality of getting those plants into production

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Master Gardeners in Nevada

By Eleanor Hoffman

During my “snowbird” months in Henderson NV, I decided to contact the local Master Gardeners. I found the Southern Region Master Gardeners at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNVReno) Cooperative Extension Center on the border between the cities of Las Vegas and Henderson. The Program Officer, Ann Edmunds, invited me to be her meeting guest and later met with me for an hour's discussion of their organization and projects. I found it interesting to understand how this group works.

Master Gardeners in Nevada are an arm of UNVReno Extension Program. They are organized into two regions, rather than by county: a northern region and a southern region. The two programs are dissimilar due to the widely differing growing regions they serve. Each region functions autonomously, and Ann could speak only about the southern region. Henderson/Las Vegas (Clark County) is the headquarters and training center for the region. The Cooperative Extension Buildings and the surrounding grounds with demonstration and experimental gardens serves as the center of operations. Dr. Angela O'Callaghan, one of the professors on staff here, supervises the Master Gardener program.

The Master Gardener program began in NV twenty years ago in 1992, and the group is enthusiastically celebrating its anniversary during the month of April. To become a Master Gardener in the southern region requires 80 hours of training, including considerable laboratory work and a mentored internship of 15 hours on the gardening hot line. Because most of the applicants are not natives of NV, the training focuses on how to garden here in the Mojave Desert. The materials used for training include UNVR fact sheets and three textbooks: Sunset Western Garden Book, Botany for Gardeners by Brian Capon, Month by Month Gardening in Nevada by Mary Irish. The courses are taught by the horticulturists on staff at the Cooperative Extension Center. Applicants within driving distance come to the center for classes and labs; those living in outer areas (approximately an hour's drive distant) meet in Pahrump, Logandale, or Laughlin and access the training on-line by means of inter-active video. Two training sessions are held annually, Spring and Fall. About 50 trainees complete each session at the Cooperative Extension Center, about 20 at the outlying centers. Turnover is about 30 percent annually; the number of active master gardeners in the region remains steady at 300.

Once certified, Master Gardeners volunteer 50 hours annually, including travel time, which for some, can be considerable. All Master Gardener projects are considered open to all members. Once a project is proposed by a member and approved by the Program Officer, the call goes out for volunteers. From the volunteers, a chairperson is selected. This chairperson sets up planning meetings, oversees the project's execution, and provides a written report to the Program Officer. A schedule of upcoming project meetings and summaries of project reports accompanies the monthly meeting announcement emailed to all master gardeners. Current Master Gardener projects include assisting with a large community gardens program, providing docents to the Springs Preserve, assisting at the Adelson Healing Gardens, assisting in the Environmental Grove at Nellis AFB, teaching classes at Acacia Park, staffing information tables when requested at Farmers' Markets and other organizations, assisting in the Test Orchard at the U Experimental Station, assisting at 2 local propagation projects. There are also the Garden Guides who escort and teach the monthly tours through the Cooperative Extension demonstration gardens. The Master Gardener Hot Line, also located in a Cooperative Extension Building, is staffed daily from 8 to 5, with three shifts of master gardeners. Queries arrive by phone, email, and walk-in. Horticulture staff are there for consultation if necessary. Spring and Autumn provide the heavier burden of projects, yet a number function year round.

The Master Gardeners of the southern region meet on the first Wednesday morning of each month. The meeting originates at the Cooperative Extension Center and is carried by inter-active video to the outlying groups. Following the introduction of newly certified master gardeners, if any, and other immediate business, there is an informational presentation. A social 30-45 minutes follows during which a pot luck brunch is served. After the brunch, there is a second hour-long presentation. For efficiency's sake, project meetings often follow the general meeting and are held at the site. Ann Edmunds noted that about 110 master gardeners attend a meeting. I was welcomed by Ann and introduced to a gentleman who escorted me to the meeting area and at brunch. I was able to speak with a number of attendees, each of whom was anxious to talk gardening in the desert.

Ann Edmunds spoke a little about the challenges of gardening in the desert, a climate she called “endearing.”

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SAFE GARDENING TECHNIQUES

Source: Renee Cottrell

- **Digging:** Insert tool vertically into soil and step on blade, then lift out small amounts.
- **Raking:** Move close to area to be raked. Use arm movements to do the work. Keep back straight and avoid twisting.
- **Weeding/Planting:** Squat or kneel. Knee pads may be helpful. Avoid bending from the waist as this places a great amount of strain on your back.
- **Mowing:** Keep arms close to sides and walk with lawn mower instead of pushing mower away from body.
- **Shoveling:** Push from end of handle shifting body weight from back leg to front. Keep knees bent and avoid twisting your back.
- **Wagon:** To steer wagon, pull along side while walking. Avoid bending or twisting your back.



Back Care (Continued from page 2)

If you use strengthening exercises to keep muscles strong in the trunk, arms, and legs, you will find it easier to stick to the above principles.

Renee also advises gardeners to watch out for activities that could cause a repetitive motion injury. She points out that as a group, gardeners can be very task oriented and prefer to weed the entire garden or do all the pruning at one time. This is an ideal way to develop a repetitive motion injury. Renee suggests that you vary activities during each gardening session. For example, you can prune for 20 minutes, then do some raking. Take a break by wandering through your yard dreaming of future projects. Weed some flowerbeds and then get back to that pruning.

Not only is it important to practice good body mechanics while gardening, it can be immensely beneficial to use the right tools. Companies are now starting to develop ergonomic gardening tools that minimize bending and accommodate various physical limitations. A quick Internet search for “Ergonomic Garden Tools” resulted in websites such as www.lifewiththease.com and www.radiusgarden.com. Renee’s favorite garden tool is a scuffle hoe, which is also referred to as a stirrup hoe. She finds it to be a great weeder, particularly in mulched beds and it also works great with those little tiny weeds that are just emerging from the soil which used to require getting down on your hands and knees to eradicate.

Another way to shorten the distance between you and your garden is to elevate the level of your garden using platforms, raised planters and raised beds. Raising beds to waist level and building them just wide enough to accommodate your reach eliminates the strain of bending and reaching. You can also construct raised beds with benches so you can sit while gardening. Again, the Internet is a great resource for ideas and guidance on constructing “enabling gardens.”

So now it is the beginning of May and you are ready to get out and tackle that garden, but you aren’t exactly in tip-top shape. What do you do? In addition to switching up the types of gardening activities you do, be sure to periodically take breaks and assess how your body is feeling. If you feel pain while gardening – take it seriously. Pain is your body’s way of warning you that something is wrong and that you need to make changes before your pain becomes a debilitating injury. It might be time to visit the medical professional of your choice to get some guidance.

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What’s New? (Continued from page 4)

smoothly and makes Debbie’s job challenging. Besides the importation process, the quarantine time, and the extended time for testing, there is also plenty of competition from other wholesale growers and nurseries in bringing plants to market. With all the choices available to the consumer, impulse buying is enticing but Debbie encourages Master Gardeners to keep educating the public on plant selection that is zone hardy appropriate and to be mindful of the mature sizes of plants when space is critical.

Bailey’s ships plants to the re-wholesalers and independent nurseries across the U.S. and in Alaska. The plants available for purchase will have a hardiness label assigned, which will stay firm until evidence from testing shows reason to change. As for the new zones map that has been released, Debbie cautions that it should be taken “with a grain of salt” and if you are not much of a risk-taker, stick with what’s working so far. However, if you don’t mind experimenting and pushing the envelope, become familiar with any microclimates in your yard, then go ahead and try a warmer zone plant. Who knows, maybe a future plant will even be sporting your name in the 2025 plant catalog!

2012 Calendar of Events

Carleton County

Annual Spring MG Plant Sale: May 19 starting at 9:00 a.m. until sell out at the Carlton Bike Pavilion. \$1, \$2, and \$3 plants.

Ask a Master Gardener Forum: May 29, Cloquet Library, 6:30—7:30 p.m., the public is invited to bring their questions and review a square foot gardening display with lots of brochures to take home.

Annual Carlton County MG Bus Trip: The trip will be to Wentworth and Winter, Wisconsin on June 2. Cost is \$25. Call Laurene at 218-879-1988 for more information.

Cook County

Container Gardening Workshop: There will be a container gardening workshop held on Saturday, June 2 from 7:30 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. at the Cook County Community Center in Grand Marais. Topics will include 'Yoga for Gardeners' with Eleanor Hoffman, 'Vegetable Growing in Containers' with Diane Booth and 'Containers in the Landscape' with Jane Horn. Demonstrations on container growing will also be held along with an Art Colony Clay Studio pot sale for one-of-a kind planting pots. Cost is \$20 and you can call 218-387-3015 to pre-register.

Container Contest and Tour: The container contest and garden tour will be on Sat., Aug. 18 from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m. at the Cook County Community Center. Call 218-387-3015 for more information.

Lake County

Lake County Mystery Tour: The tour will take place in late July/early August. To be placed on the mailing list, please call 218-834-8377. Please mention the Master Gardener Mystery Tour if you leave a voicemail.

St. Louis County

Duluth Women's Club Garden Tour: This tour is scheduled for Wed., July 18 from 10 a.m.- 4 p.m. Cost is \$30 and includes lunch. Call 218-724-3168 by July 11 to pre-register.

Secret Garden Tour: The tour is scheduled for Sat., July 21, starting at 8:15 a.m. The cost is \$35 if you go on the bus and wish to have lunch. Otherwise, the cost is \$17 if you pick up the information and travel on your own. Watch the website at www.duluthflowersociety.com for more information.

Duluth Garden Flower Society Flower Show: This will be held July 27 at Noon at the Radisson Hotel, downtown Duluth. It is free and more information is available at 218-529-9678.

Great Gardening: PBS channel 8 garden show on Thursdays through June 14 starting at 7:00 p.m.

Back Care

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Even if you are already suffering from back or joint pain, there is no need to give up gardening. To quote Renee Cottrell, "back issues are a forever consideration, not a forever limitation." Learn proper body mechanic techniques as well as stretching and strengthening exercises that will accommodate your issues and help prevent further injury. Invest in some new tools that will help you maintain your garden with a minimal amount of strain on your back and joints. And most of all – be patient with your body. It took years to develop those aches and pains and it will take some time and self-discipline to get back to where you would like to be. Your first step should be a consultation with a medical professional, being clear on what your goals are and being open to their guidance on how you can reach them.

I am grateful to Renee for her advice and guidance. I hope it will help you to preserve your back so that you may have many years of pain-free gardening ahead of you!

Nevada Master Gardeners

(Continued from page 5)

She says you can grow most anything here, you just need to know how to do it. What's good? Southern Nevada has almost no serious cold so gardening can be a year round activity if one wishes. Disease is sparse because there are few bugs and few fungi due to the low humidity. What's the problem? Southern Nevada receives only 4 inches of rain a year; summer temperatures rise well above 100 degrees; the native soil is alkaline (salty) and almost devoid of nutrients. Also, occasional high winds can, in a short time, seriously desiccate trees and shrubs.

What to do? The obvious, of course, is to select plants bred to grow here. Moreover, compost, compost, and more compost is recommended, as are raised beds for vegetables. Irrigation, which can be accomplished in numerous ways, is mandatory for non-native plants. And water scarcity necessitates that it be done efficiently. Mulch is also a must to keep soils cool and hinder evaporation of precious water. Learning to garden here requires reevaluating much of what is considered "common knowledge" in order to work with the desert. Whether one is growing roses (which do well here), vegetables, or a xeriscape, the Mojave is in control. The gardener must do the adjusting.



UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA
EXTENSION

NE Master Gardener Newsletter

317 W. 5th Street
Grand Marais, MN 55604

The University of Minnesota is committed to the policy that all persons shall have equal access to its programs, facilities, and employment without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation.

Would you like to receive a printed newsletter in the mail?

The cost for us to mail out 4 colored issues a year is \$10.
Please make a check out to: Cook County Extension and mail
with your name and address to:
NE Master Gardener Newsletter
317 W. 5th Street, Grand Marais, MN 55604

Kit Sitter, MG with Lake County

has been accepted as one of the Northern representatives on the State MG Advisory Board. She has been a Master Gardener since 2007 and her 3 year term begins in June. She will bring you news from the Board in future NE Regional Newsletters.

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We are looking for more people to help with the newsletter. If you are interested, please contact the above folks from your county.

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